November and NaNoWriMo: Celebrating the Best Writing in Gaming

Community NerdyBirdy Nov 10, 2021

For thousands of writers and authors, November is more than a month of fall colors and Thanksgiving. It’s also a time of frantic, non-stop writing. As National Novel Writing Month, November is the host of NaNoWriMo, an online drive for writers to complete a novel-sized manuscript before the month ends. The inhuman task of writing 40,000 words or more in under a month can understandably require some long nights, as well as frequent literary inspiration.

Officially a US-based non-profit, National Novel Writing Month or NaNoWriMo, is officially dedicated to promoting creative writing around the globe. The organization provides professional mentoring from well-known authors, as well as information for communities to meet and write together. The organization’s flagship event in November is their most popular. Starting in 1999 with 21 participants, the event has grown to over 450,000 in 2019.

To help encourage and inspire our own NaNoWriMo participants within the Xbox Ambassador’s community, we’ve outlined some of the best examples of writing in gaming. Each of the following games was selected for their compelling and engaging storylines, character development and narrative arcs.

- Red Dead Redemption

Generally considered one of the greatest video games ever made, Red Dead Redemption is also a narrative and storytelling classic. Featuring an expansive open-world based on a fictionalized version of the Western and Southwestern United States, Red Dead Redemption tells the story of John Marston, a former outlaw who's forced to bring in three members of his former gang after the government takes his wife and children hostage. Red Dead Redemption combined an intricate and richly developed story with innovative gameplay such as a "Dead Eye" shooting mechanic, and an in-game "honor and loyalty" system.

Image: Rockstar Games

- Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

Originally released in 2003, Knights of the Old Republic is still considered one of the greatest games of all time, and especially lauded for its story and character development. The protagonist's character is constantly pushed to make different decisions that, depending upon the action taken, can push the character further down the "dark" or "light" alignment of the force. Ultimately, each character develops into a composite of the many micro-decisions that were taken over the course of the game.

Image: BioWare

- Life Is Strange

Inspired by the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, Life is Strange offers an episodic, story-based approach to graphic adventure gaming. The plot focuses on Max Caulfield, a photography student who discovers that she has ability to rewind time. Each of the decisions that the player makes to turn back time, however, has far-reaching effects on other outcomes of the game’s story. Praised for its story, characters, and carefully curated soundtrack, Life Is Strange helped pave the way for a new generation of slice-of-life indie gaming.

Image: Square Enix

- Stardew Valley

Developed singlehandedly by developer, designer, musician and writer Eric Barrone, Stardew Valley is arguably the most successful independently developed game in history. Stardew Valley’s protagonist is a dissatisfied former office worker who turns to farming and the small-town life. The game’s relaxing gameplay mechanics and deeply engrossing character narratives won the game critical praise and acclaim. In addition to a deeply engrossing farming simulation, Stardew Valley is known for its layered and thoughtful relationships that the protagonist develops with the town’s residents.

Image: ConcernedApe

- BioShock

Set in a fictional 1960, BioShock takes the player to the undersea city of Rapture. Built originally to house a business and artistic elite, the city has morphed into a dystopian nightmare filled with superhuman mutant monsters and terrified residents. Universally praised by critics for its morality centered narrative and immersive gameplay, BioShock is mentioned as both one of the greatest games of all time as well as a paragon of gaming as an art medium.

Image: 2K Games

- Alan Wake

It’s fitting that a game with a fiction writer as its protagonist should be considered one of the best written games ever. Alan Wake opens with the title character struggling to find his missing wife and piece together his life after watching her taken by dark and demonic elements in the fictional town of Bright Falls, Washington. Written by Finnish novelist Sam Lake, Alan Wake takes narrative gaming to new literary heights as the very idea of fiction and literature emerge to take center stage in the game’s plot and storyline.

Image: Microsoft Game Studios

- What Remains of Edith Finch

Released in 2017, What Remains of Edith Finch is a first-person exploration game that explores the Finch home in search of clues on the mysterious curse that causes members of the family to die in unusual ways. With its unique take on storytelling and episodic gameplay, What Remains of Edith Finch won awards in development and storytelling in both 2017 and 2018.

Image: Annapurna Interactive

From first-person shooters to farming simulations, great writing is found in all types of video games. As we celebrate the writers who make gaming possible, we invite you to share your own favorite games, or games that you feel showcase the best of videogame writing and storytelling.

What games pulled you in with their characters, plot, and storytelling? What games do you find yourself returning to time and time again?